

ICPS newsletter®

NGO cooperation can make public policy better

Public influence on government policy can be considerably increased by expanding the network of NGOs that are capable of analyzing public policy and organizing consultations with stakeholders. A joint ICPS-Razumkov Center project has demonstrated one of the most effective ways of disseminating experience and standards of analytical work, thanks to which local NGOs were able to carry out a number of successful policy campaigns

Now that the primary stage of third sector development in Ukraine is pretty much complete, the issue of increasing its effectiveness comes to the fore. The Government of Ukraine is aware of its inability to impartially and consensually manage processes that require multivector research and the input of many-sided points-of-view.

The emergence of political competition and awareness in political circles that only those politicians who are the most effective and successful will have the support of the electorate is forcing them to recognize the need to involve non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the development of public policy.

The role of the third sector here is to set political competition on track as a competition of public policy options, rather than a competition of mudslinging. Still, its effectiveness leaves much to be desired, even as the number and scale of NGO activities have increased. Alongside a handful of well-developed institutions based in the capital, there are too many NGOs, including regional ones, that still lack the necessary experience, know-how and access to resources that would make them capable of effectively influencing public policy and strengthening the position of the third sector across the country.

As political competition intensifies and reaches the most remote regions, NGO analysts should be able to provide politicians at any level with in-depth and accurate analysis of key issues using best methods and practices

available. Networks of NGO are well-placed to take on these tasks effectively.

Examples of how to effectively implement large-scale and long-term programs using NGO networks can be found in Poland's successful preparations for EU accession. The establishment of such associations made it possible to organize experience-sharing, train less-experienced NGOs and coordinate NGO efforts in different regions and at different times. The Polish experience showed that, for transition countries, networks are an important part of the infrastructure and institutions of democracy, as they remain constant regardless of election results and are capable of withstanding attempts to return to autocracy.

ICPS and Razumkov Center set up regional network

One possible way to ensure the success of cooperative NGO activities was demonstrated by a joint project called "Developing Capacity Among Regional Policy Centers to Analyze Policy at the Local Level" between the International Center for Policy Studies and the Razumkov Center for Economic and Political Studies. Funded by the International Renaissance Foundation, the two Ukrainian think-tanks joined forces over the course of the past year to transfer standards of public policy research to six regional organizations developed through open competition in Drohobych, Donetsk, Kolomyia, Mykolaiv, Trostyanets, and Striy. In the process of

George Soros visits anniversary meeting of ICPS Board

During a five-day visit to Ukraine, well-known Hungarian-American financier and patron of civil society George Soros attended a special meeting of the ICPS Supervisory Board dedicated to the 10th anniversary of the International Center for Policy Studies, whose foundation was the initiative of Mr. Soros's Open Society Institute.

Board members and ICPS guests listened to a presentation by the Center's top specialists on the main political, economic and social processes in Ukraine today, their view of key issues, options for resolving them, and the Center's role in this process.

A lively discussion followed, about key issues and development priorities in Ukraine today. Participants included Yevhen Bersheda, Inna Bohoslovska, Vitaliy Melnychuk, Ihor Shumylo, Viktor Yushchenko and other illustrious guests and Board members.

working on regional projects involving the analysis of local policy, participants learned about the components of the democratic decision-making process, how to analyze regional policy, and the standards of independent research. Each NGO also prepared policy papers on local development issues that they had selected themselves and carried out a public awareness campaign.

The project organizers and participants together presented the main results of these activities at the wrap-up conference on March 30, 2004. Participants said that, thanks to the assistance they were given and to the modern approaches to public policy

campaigning, in a relatively short time, the regional NGOs succeeded in demonstrating their effectiveness to their local governments and communities, and to achieve substantial results.

Kolomyia commits itself to reforming residential services

The Kolomyia Economic Development Association persuaded its local community to participate in determining the city's development priorities for the city. They organized a dialog among representatives of the government, the community and local businesses. They also carried out a public opinion survey that highlighted residential building services as the most urgent priority area for change. As a result of this work, proposals to reform the city's residential services and utilities were developed:

- involving the public in the decision-making process through an Advisory Committee;
- setting up joint owners societies and uniting them into a city-wide association;
- organizing a competitive residential services market;
- setting up a central information and billing service.

Two notable achievements of the public awareness campaign were increasing the trust of the local government in civil organizations, which could see that it was getting real help in resolving common problems, and giving the city effective support through the process of public participation in making decisions about local development.

Mykolaiv approves municipal tax policy with the help of NGOs

The example of the Mykolaiv Association of Business Employers demonstrates the potential for applying policy analysis methods in major industrial cities and oblast centers.

From the beginning, analysts focused on improving the effectiveness of local tax policy. During the project, key issues and priorities were defined, municipal policy options were developed and examined,

the possible impacts of each policy option were analyzed, and the needed resources were determined. The analytical work of non-government specialists, based on consultations with the general public, resulted in the approval of two important regulatory documents at the Mykolaiv City Hall. *A Concept of City Tax Policy Reform* was approved which defined key problems in municipal taxation, their causes, and priority measures, goals and principles for reforming the city's existing tax policies.

A Procedure for Applying Tax Policy in Mykolaiv was adopted, which set rules for:

- the powers and obligations of the various players determining city tax policy;
- procedures for preparing decisions to set, change or cancel taxes and fees, and to extend or remove tax breaks;
- mandatory regulatory impact studies of draft documents in local tax policy;
- accompanying the preparation of draft local tax legislation with independent analytical and consultative support.

Representatives from the Mykolaiv NGO reported that, with the help of policy papers that were written in a logically coherent and accessible manner, within eight months they were able to get approval for decisions that had been stalled for two years.

Trostanets NGO becomes a player in developing local policy

The Trostanets (Sumy oblast) Association of Entrepreneurs defined its main goals as developing procedures to improve their city's budget process and getting the Trostanets community involved in local policy development. The result was the approval of two regulations by City Council: *a Statute on Public Hearings and Budget Regulations for Trostanets City Council*. This was preceded by a public opinion survey among local officials, businesses and individual residents as to their view of key city issues and gaining consensus in the community as to how to resolve these issues.

The finished project served as a good example of lobbying the community's interests and was followed by greater cooperation between government officials and NGOs. Recognizing the benefit of having community and NGO participation in developing high-quality analysis, officials suggested working together with the independent analysts on the City Statutes, on a Municipal Plan for Social and Economic Development and on a Strategy for the Development of the Municipality of Trostanets. In addition, one City Council decision was to scrap the existing plan for developing the city and to turn it over to the Trostanets Association of Entrepreneurs for reworking.

At the moment, a project financed by the European Commission is being carried out, in which the Trostanets Association of Entrepreneurs has committed itself to disseminating their experience to other NGOs in Sumy oblast.

Striy takes on the research of labor migration issues

The Western Ukrainian Center for Human Rights and Civil Initiatives in Striy, in L'viv oblast, focused its efforts on researching a key issue in western Ukraine: the migration of its workers to neighboring countries. The project's aim was to analyze local labor migration policy using 11 villages in the Striy region as a basis and to develop recommendations for effective impact on migration processes. Among their outputs from the sociological surveys and public debates were policy papers that they presented to the Striy District Council: *The Principles of Business Development, Cooperatives, and Green Tourism; The Principles of Establishing and Running Labor Migration Advisory Centers; The Principles of Rural Labor Migration Policy*. The researchers will continue their work and plan to present the new results to the L'viv Oblast Council and to get approval for the principles for establishing labor migrant policy. They will also work to get approval for a pilot project financial support program for Striy district. ■

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